

PART I - ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Updating the

OER System

Story by Joe Burlas

THOUGH the latest version of the Officer Evaluation Report “accurately assesses officers’ performance and potential” — according to personnel managers — refinements are being made as a result of an eight-month review of the system, Army officials said.

The OER is doing what it was designed to do — assess an officer’s performance and potential, so that officials can more aptly identify, assign and select the best-qualified officers for promotion, training and command duties, said George Piccirilli, the U.S. Total Army Personnel Command’s officer evaluation system chief.

He should know that first-hand; he briefs each officer board on the OER and reviews selection results and board surveys when the board adjourns.

Over the past year Piccirilli’s had a lot of feedback indicating that board members find it difficult to separate the rater’s remarks about the officer’s performance from remarks about his or her potential, as both are entered in the same section of the OER.

To eliminate the confusion, PERSCOM will soon direct all commands to request raters to double-space between the “performance” and “potential” entries until the actual OER form can be revised and fielded.

The OER review was prompted, in part, by the officer Army Training and Leader Development Panel study, released last May, which reported a perception in the field that Army

culture expected a “zero-defects” performance from its leaders.

Following the results of the study, Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki directed a further review of the OER system.

The officer ATLDP also found that many officers believed that a “center-of-mass” check on the OER by the senior rater meant no possibility of promotion beyond captain.

“Center-of-mass ratings are not a ‘killer,’” Piccirilli said, “and promotion board results bear that out.”

Promotions are based on Army requirements, Piccirilli said, and those requirements often dictate the selection line between “promote” and “do not promote” to be drawn somewhere in the center-of-mass population.

As part of the OER review, surveyed senior leaders and junior officers were offered alternatives to the senior-rater portion of the current OER. Almost all chose to remain with the current system, Piccirilli said.

Counseling is another area of concern identified by the ATLDP study. The subsequent OER system review found mixed results in field interviews. Some units conduct counseling very well, others don’t, Piccirilli said.

By regulation, raters must conduct a face-to-face initial counseling session with all rated officers within 30 days of the start of the rated period. Periodic follow-up counseling should be conducted, as needed, to make adjustments to agreed-upon

goals, Piccirilli said.

For rated lieutenants and warrant officers 1, quarterly development counseling is required and includes the use of the Junior Officer Development Support Form.

“We’ve found the best units schedule appropriate counseling and mark it on their training calendars in advance,” he said. “It’s a visible mark on the wall, so everyone knows what’s expected and when it’s supposed to be done.”

Piccirilli advised rated officers who are not receiving the mandatory counseling to seek appropriate opportunities to ask for rater feedback.

Counseling doesn’t need to be a formal sit-down session. It can be a frank discussion at the motor pool or on the training range, Piccirilli said, as long as it covers the performance bases. Those bases include what the officer has been doing right, what he’s been doing wrong, what improvements can be made and how he stacks up against others. “It can be tough to look someone in the eye and tell him he’s at the bottom of the totem pole,” Piccirilli said, “but every officer deserves to know where he stands before an OER is filed.” □



For more information on the OER system and officer promotion rates visit PERSCOM Online at

<https://www.perscom.army.mil>

and select the Officer Information link under the Soldier Services section.

Joe Burlas works for the Army News Service at the Pentagon.